DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 459 553 EC 308 740

AUTHOR	Leonardi, Roy; Roberts, Jane; Wasoka, David
TITLE	Skillstreaming: A Report to the Vermont State Department of Education.
SPONS AGENCY	Vermont State Dept. of Education, Montpelier.
PUB DATE	2001-10-00
NOTE	14p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Basic Skills; *Behavior Change; *Behavior Disorders; Delinquency; Discipline; Elementary Education; Individualized Education Programs; *Interpersonal Competence; Intervention; *Skill Development; *State Standards
IDENTIFIERS	Social Skills Training; *Vermont

ABSTRACT

This paper describes application of a prosocial skills program called Skillstreaming with 12 elementary students diagnosed either with emotional and/or behavioral disorders or with high incidences of school disciplinary actions. The Skillstreaming program has three components: anger management, moral reasoning, and social skills development. The 50 specific Skillstreaming social skills were matched with 22 Vermont State Standards, thus integrating the Skillstreaming program with the general curriculum and Individualized Education Program behavior plans. A rubric for specifying the student's level of skill mastery was also developed. From October through May, students received Skillstreaming instruction in twice weekly sessions, which followed the Skillstreaming process of explaining a skill, modeling the skill, having the children practice the skill, and then encouraging the children to use the skill in general settings. The Skillstreaming curriculum was also introduced to special education teachers at five other schools. Evaluation indicated that participating students experienced a very substantial reduction in school disciplinary actions. (Contains 14 references.) (DB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made

EC

ED 459 553

Skillstreaming: A Report to the Vermont State Department of Education

Authors:
Dr. Roy Leonardi
Ms. Jane Roberts
Mr. David Wasoka

Contact:
Dr. Roy Leonardi
Associate Professor
Department of Special Education
Southern Connecticut State University
501 Crescent Street
New Haven CT 06515 203-392-5947

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Leonardi
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

EC 308740

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Introduction

A significant issue facing American schools is the rising level of violence. The incidences of violence have increased not only in frequency but also in severity. In part, the type of violence that has erupted in the past several years has been a result of external and internal social crisis. Increasingly children come to school from homes where the income is below the poverty level, raised in single family homes, with working mothers unable to find, or pay for, childcare. These forces create problems between the school and child from before the child walks into the building (Wood & Long, 1991).

The internal dynamics of the school create situations where children face crisis by using sarcasm, intimidation, insults, and ultimately violence. While external factors create a level of tension before the child comes into the school, many schools are unable or unwilling to manage the anti-social behaviors. (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997, LeBlanc, 1999). There are significant numbers of students that are disaffected, angry, and lack the skills to participate in a community setting as responsible citizens.

Education

We would argue that education is the preparation for citizenship by the cultivation of what Maritain, a twentieth-century theologian and philosopher, calls the "interior principle" (Maritain, 1985, p.46). The interior principle is the development of the human person such that "the gravity of the individual diminishes." The individual is educated in order to become "a part of the greater whole" (Maritain, 1985, p. 46). We were working with students who lacked the skills to function appropriately in social settings. It was obvious to us that we were working with children who had not had the opportunity to develop appropriate behavioral responses to varying social situations. By most definitions these children did not behave as good citizens, had few impulse controls, and tended to react to stressful situations with some degree of anger.

For Maritain, as with many of the classical western philosophers, Education is the vehicle that teaches "the person as a social unit" to participate in action toward the "common good as the end of the social whole" (Maritain, 1985, p. 48-50). To Maritain "the end of the society is the good of the community, of the social body." Within this context, for more than twenty centuries the same interior principles that

guided a citizen of ancient Athens would guide the citizens of modern America. Aristotelian education was based in an investigative process that required an external search and internal synthesis. In Aristotle's Athens, Education was a "science which investigates ..." and the teachers are "those people who instruct us ... [who] tell us the causes of each thing" (Aristotle, 1984, Vol. I, p. 144). The bridge between Aristotle and excellent modern educational systems is the encouragement of systematic investigation and sound teaching.

We introduced a program to some of our most disaffected students at the site where we work. The program that we selected was experienced-based and offered a group of skills that progressed developmentally. We felt that "Skillstreaming" (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997), if we could teach the basic principles, was a program that would develop the foundation skills of good citizenship.

Modern Times

With the passage of the federal law 94-142 in 1975, the basis for IDEA (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997), children with disabilities were provided specialized programs designed with individual plans(Bos &Vaughn, 1991). For more than ten years, the segregation of children with disabilities was a common and largely unquestioned practice. In 1986, Madeline Will, an Undersecretary of Education, made an argument for the inclusion of children with disabilities into regular programs. This became known as the Regular Education Initiative (Will, 1986). There are researchers who argue against the value of inclusionary efforts (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995; Shanker, 1994; Vernon, 1987). And there are researchers who argue for inclusionary efforts (Baker, Wang & Walberg, 1994; Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, & Schattman, 1993).

The purpose of our study was not to address these arguments but to recognize that inclusionary efforts are being supported by federal and state agencies, especially in Vermont. We are aware of some recent studies and these provided for us a backdrop for our work. In a review of three meta-analysis researchers found "that special needs students educated in regular classes do better academically and socially than comparable students in non-inclusive settings" (Baker, et al., 1994, p.34). In a study conducted in Vermont, seventeen of nineteen teachers who were surveyed described their efforts at inclusion as a "transformation." The researchers were able to identify positive changes in teachers and

students toward children with disabilities (Giangreco, et al., 1993, p. 367-79). As special education professionals, we work toward including our students in regular programs. We also realize that there are students in special education programs who have not developed the social skills to participate successfully in regular programs.

We view education as an inclusionary process that is best developed when students and teachers understand how to use appropriate social skills in various situations. We view positive educational progress as a process based in the individual's recognition that crisis and stress can be managed by controlling anger, understanding the moral implications of violent actions, and the development of prosocial skills. With these thoughts as a philosophical and moral backdrop, we instituted a Skillstreaming program at our site.

Background

We work in a medium size city in a rural area of Vermont. The K – 12 programs are located at a single site. The school had a group of children who had not developed appropriate social skills. We attended a yearlong program that trained us in the use of a prosocial skills program called Skillstreaming (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997). The program has three components, Anger Management, Moral Reasoning, and Skillstreaming. In order to enhance our own methods of using these techniques, we introduced Skillstreaming to a group of elementary students and to a group of high school students. Our intention was to demonstrate the program and then introduce the program to other teachers in our town and in surrounding towns.

We worked with approximately twelve students for nine months. In October, 1998 we selected a group of eight elementary students to participate in a pilot program. We picked two students in Special Education who were diagnosed with emotional and behavioral disorders and the other six students were selected for their high incidences of suspensions and for the significant number of times that they were sent to the principal office. The high school teacher who ran a program for children with emotional and behavioral disorders introduced the program to his class in the month of January, 1999.

For this report we will focus on the Skillstreaming as it was developed with the elementary school students. The elementary program was started to meet the IEP requirements of a student who had a series of

violent confrontations with other children. Additionally this student had touched girl students improperly. In late September the IEP (Individual Education Plan) Team, including the student's pediatrician, had met with the student and his family. A behavior plan was implemented at this meeting. In October, there was a reoccurrence of violent and other inappropriate behavior. The IEP Team reconvened and developed a more detailed behavior plan that was based on a more extensive functional analysis.

An element of the functional analysis was the fact that the student's behavior was a manifestation of his emotional disability. A second factor was the understanding that his behavior was a method, albeit inappropriate form, of communication. Using Goldstein's and McGinnis's (1997) premise that children from lower income backgrounds are not encouraged to be reflective about their language, and by assumption not reflective about their behavior, we wrote a Skillstreaming program into the student's revised behavior plan.

We then had to create a group of students who could participate in this program. We went to the principal and the guidance counselor and asked for a group of "the most difficult children in the school." We defined "difficulty" as children who are frequently sent to the office, who are frequently disciplined for inappropriate behavior, and who have a history of suspensions. From this group we identified eight students, five boys and three girls, with a range of grades from second through sixth. One student refused to participate and after three sessions he was excused from the program. One student had an escalating pattern of inappropriate behavior and in March she was placed in our district's new alternative school program.

The Skillstreaming Program

Once the group was identified, we prepared a schedule of meetings, and a notice of permission that was sent to the parents. We purchased the curriculum materials for the program and in October, 1998 we met with the children. The cost of the materials was less than fifty dollars. Of concern to us, to the teaching staff, school administrators, and to some parents was how the program connected to the Vermont State Standards (Vermont Department of Education, 1996). There are seven broad Standard's areas with 39 specific categories for these State Standards. There are six broad Skillstreaming areas with fifty specific social skills that are addressed in the Skillstreaming program. We connected each of the fifty social skills to

twenty-two specific Vermont Standards. This allowed us to develop a Skillstreaming program that could be used as a relevant part of the general curriculum and also as a legitimate factor in developing an IEP with a Behavior Plan. The complexity of the Social Skill determines the number of Standards that are addressed by the Skill.

The first Skill in Skillstreaming is a Beginning Social Skill that is identified as Listening. The Skill of Listening addresses the following State Standards:

1.13 Students listen actively and respond to communication.

1.14 Students critique what they have heard.

1.15 Students use verbal and nonverbal skills to express themselves effectively.

2.1 Students ask a variety of questions.

3.3 Students demonstrate respect for themselves and others.

The fiftieth of the Social Skills, and is in the category of Planning Skills, is identified as Concentrating on a Task. This highest level of Skillstreaming addresses more of the State Standards and increases to more complex Standards. The Standards that are addressed are:

1.13 Students listen actively and respond to communications.

1.14 Students critique what they have heard

1.15 Students use verbal and nonverbal skills to express themselves effectively.

2.1 Students ask a variety of questions.

2.2 Students use reasoning strategies, knowledge, & common sense to solve complex problems related to all fields of knowledge.

2.3 Students solve problems of increasing complexity.

2.6 Students apply prior knowledge, curiosity, imagination, & creativity to solve problems.

2.7 Students respond to new information & reflect on experience & reconsider their opinions & sources of information.

2.8 Students demonstrate a willingness to take risks in order to learn.

2.9 Students persevere in the face of challenges and obstacles.

2.10 Students generate several ideas using a variety of competencies.

2.11 Students represent their ideas using a variety of approaches.

2.12 Students modify or change their original ideas &/or the ideas of others in detailed format.

2.14 Students plan and organize an activity.

3.3 Students demonstrate respect for themselves and others.

3.7 Students make informed decisions.

3.14 Students demonstrate dependability, productivity, and initiative.

4.1 Students take an active role in their community.

4.2 Students participate in democratic processes.

4.3 Students demonstrate an understanding of the cultural expressions that are characteristic of particular groups.

4.5 Students understand continuity and change.

We have attached a list of the complete set of Social Skills and the applicable Standards to this report. The notion that we are attempting to impress is that the Goldstein & McGinnis (1997) program ties directly to the Vermont Standards. In a cursory inventory of the California Frameworks, these Skills can be applied to applicable California's Frameworks.

An additional factor that influenced how we structured this program involved the rubric for identifying the student's mastery of a skill. Vermont is in the process of transitioning from one type of a rubric to a more detailed rubric. The current format is in a form that is currently applied in many educational plans. As an example:

GOAL: To develop positive social skills.

OBJECTIVE: By (date), Student will work on 4 Aggression Replacement Skills, and demonstrate through role playing, and Life Situations, 90% Mastery of Skills.

When we developed the original behavior plan we used the above format. As we proceeded with the Skillstreaming training we began to develop a process that could include the new rubric that has been recommended by the Vermont State Department of Education.

The new recommended format uses the following process and we have provided this example of how we feel that it can be presented.:

GOAL: To develop positive social skills

Transition ⟶ **Skill**

(Standard 4.5) Understanding Continuity & Change

In the words of the student:

I need to work on this	**I'm getting it**	**I am there**
3 times a week I get into trouble when go to lunch	1 time a week I get sent to the office to eat lunch	For 10 days I have I have been able to eat lunch in the cafeteria

We addressed the issues of Standards and Measurements because of the concerns that Special Educators have for the accountability of their programs. We felt that by using this rubric and linking the Social Skills to the Standards we adequately addressed the concerns of educators.

Pro-Social Skills Training

Our first contact with parents was through individual meetings or phone calls. Following these introductions, we sent a letter to the parents (attachment is included) that introduced the program. We used a survey process (attachment included) and asked the parents to select skills that they felt were important to their child. This letter included a schedule of meetings and contact information with us.

From October through May we met with the students approximately twice weekly for a total of thirty-eight sessions. We provided some type of snack at the beginning of each session. We discussed any trouble the students may have had with recent social contacts. These conversations were excellent openings for moral reasoning discussions. We could discuss both appropriate and inappropriate behavioral responses. We especially focused on the student's role within the larger school community.

We followed the Skillstreaming process of explaining a skill, modeling the skill, having the children practice the skill, and then encouraging the student to use the skill in general settings. The children were able to hear the skill described verbally. We would provide the skill's definition in written format. We would model the use of the skill. The children would describe how they could use the skill. They would

demonstrate how they would use the skill. We would critique the demonstration. Finally the child would use the skill in a generalized setting, such as their home or neighborhood, and then report back to the group. The key to this process was that it was action oriented, and process driven. In Aristotelian terms, it was a process of inquiry.

During the year, we introduced the Skillstreaming curriculum to the special education teachers in the towns that comprised our supervisory union. We used a movie and other materials to demonstrate key aspects of the program. At a later date, we described the format of the program to a school staff. Finally, we offered to provide access to a statewide, weeklong conference that had a focus on social skills training. Twelve teachers from three towns and the director of the alternative school attended the conference.

As a follow-up to the conference, the twelve of us met for a workshop that we scheduled during summer vacation. At this workshop, we discussed key aspects of the conference. We distributed materials and practiced through role playing how we could deliver Skillstreaming in our schools. We reviewed, through role playing, a moral reasoning conversation and an anger management conversation. The outcome of our training sessions is the realization that three elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school will use the Skillstreaming format during the school year 1999-2000.

Observations

As the sessions progressed there were certain observable behavioral changes that can be best described anecdotally, a type of analysis that we felt was appropriate for this study (Glesne, 1991). The first behavior that changed was the children's entrance to the room. We used several rooms in the building for our training sessions. The sessions lasted for thirty minutes. During the first four sessions the children took more than five minutes to come under control. The initial sessions were spent describing the protocols of the training session. Our expectations were that the children would greet us appropriately upon entering. The children would take a seat, speak gently, and not engage in any type of rough play. One child refused to participate. He was verbally defiant and continuously interrupted any conversations. This child was excused from the program following the third session.

By the fifth session the children would enter the room, take a seat, and share conversation while eating the snack. Within five minutes we would begin our session. The sessions began with the children discussing social interactions with which they were having difficulties. The protocol for these discussions was structured so that one person spoke at a time. After the child finished describing the incident other students were able to ask questions or make observations.

Three changes occurred as the program progressed. First, the children were able to describe events using greater detail and more insights. Second, the children who were listening, listened more attentively. Interruptions decreased, and if there were interruptions they became more relevant. Third, the suggestions that were offered by listeners had increased in maturity.

For instance, earlier discussions were about more banal issues, such as "farting." The responses by the listeners were interjected with slurs such as, "that's gay," or "that sucks." As we progressed, the discussions focused on serious social issues such as making more appropriate choices and using less aggressive language or physical force. Embedded in the discussions were conversations that had moral implications. If a student had used inappropriate language during a confrontation, we were able to discuss why the language was inappropriate. We were also able to discuss the variety of appropriate choices that could have been used. A significant part of the discussion was the reasoning that made a choice appropriate or inappropriate.

When a student had used inappropriate language we were also able to examine whether the words were spoken in anger. This led to a discussion about ways to control angry responses and the reasons for controlling anger. The responses and suggestions from the listeners offered suggestions that were more socially appropriate and devoid of improper language.

The use of language by the participants became more appropriate during these sessions. We spent time focusing on homophobic and gender language. By the sixth session, we had few issues with the children using words like "gay," "queer," or "fag."

The improved language also had an effect on the demeanor of the children towards each other. The first skills that we covered were around making and receiving an introduction. Our first attempts with these skills were met with resistance. The children would not shake hands. For same-sex introductions it

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

was "queer" or "gay." For other-gender introductions, it was "I don't touch girls." Or, "boys give me cooties." Race differences, however, were never an issue.

By the end of the program, the children could come into the room and make very socially appropriate greetings. Touching was appropriate and did not involve any sarcastic or demeaning comments.

From these observations, we concluded that behaving in a socially appropriate manner is a learned skill. While the program would stray from the Skillstreaming script, we believe that we covered major areas of pro-social skills, anger management control, and moral reasoning techniques.

Results

We began with the basic skills of introducing one's self, listening, giving compliments, and accepting compliments. As the sessions progressed there were certain results that were evident.

First: The children knew the schedule and were anxious to attend our skills' training sessions. The children would remind the office staff in the morning when a session was scheduled.

Second: There were no suspensions for these children between October and May. Prior to the sessions the students averaged in aggregate approximately one suspension every two weeks.

Third: The students' timeouts in the office decreased, in aggregate, from approximately one per day, to approximately three per week. Two of the students were not sent to the office during this ensuing training period.

Fourth: We introduced the notion of Skillstreaming to the other special educators in our supervisory union.

Fifth: We specifically reviewed the process for the elementary school staff at a faculty meeting.

Sixth: We made contracts with administrators and teachers from three school districts to include Skillstreaming in their program development. Twelve teachers from three districts and five schools have been trained in the teaching of Skillstreaming, Anger Management, and Moral Development.

Summary

In summary, our participation in this program helped us to work directly and successfully with twelve children who were severely at-risk. We were able to introduce the concept of Skillstreaming to five other schools and we brought staff from those schools to a statewide conference. Our belief is that we were able to help students directly, and by demonstrating the success of the program, we introduced the program to a broader population. In 1999-2000 we anticipate that through our efforts five school districts, in two states, and eleven schools will use Skillstreaming as part of their social skills curriculum. We believe that this program will help to provide dozens of children with the chance to learn the social skills that will help them to become good and productive citizens.

Bibliography

Aristotle (1984). Hutchins, R.M. (Ed.) Great Books Vol. 8. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica.

Baker, E. & Wang, M., & Walberg, H. (1994). The effects of inclusion on learning. Educational Leadership, 52(4), 33-35.

Bos, C. & Vaughn S. (1991). Strategies for teaching students with learning and behavior problems. Needham Hgts. MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Fuchs, D. & Fuchs, L.S. (1995). What's special about special education?. Phi Delta Kappan, 76(7), 522-530.

Giangreco, M., Dennis, R., Cloninger, C., Edelman, S., & Schattman, R. (1993). "I've counted Jon": transformational experiences of teachers educating students with disabilities. Exceptional Children, 59(4), 359-372.

Glesne, C. (1991). Yet another role? The teacher as researcher. Action in Teacher Education, 13(1), 7-13.

Goldstein, A. & McGinnis, E. (1997). Skillstreaming the adolescent. Champaign, IL: Research Press.

LeBlanc, A. (1999). The outsiders. The New York Times Magazine, August 22, 1999.

Maritain J.M. (1985). The person and the common good. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Shanker, A. (1994). Full inclusion is neither free nor appropriate. Educational Leadership, 52(4), 18-21.

Vernon, M. (1987). Education's three mile island: P.L. 94-142. In J.W. Noll (Ed.) Taking Sides (pp. 321-326). Guilford, CT: The Dushkin Publishing Group.

Will, M. (1986). Educating children with learning problems: A shared responsibility. Exceptional Children, 52, 411-415.

Wood, M. & Long, N. (1991). Life space crisis intervention. Austin, TX: Pro-ed.